

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

JEANNE JONES,

Plaintiff,

-against-

CVS PHARMACY, INC. and CVS ALBANY,
LLC,

Defendants.

ORDER

23-CV-01372 (PMH)

PHILIP M. HALPERN, United States District Judge:

CVS Pharmacy, Inc. and CVS Albany, LLC (“Defendants”) filed a Notice of Removal on February 17, 2023, removing this action from the Supreme Court of the State of New York, County of Westchester, to this Court. (Doc. 1, “Not. of Removal”). For the reasons set forth below, this matter is REMANDED to the Supreme Court of the State of New York, County of Westchester.

BACKGROUND

On February 17, 2023, Defendants filed a Notice of Removal, which attached as an exhibit a copy of Plaintiff’s Summons and Verified Complaint (Doc. 1-2, “Compl.”). Defendants claim that this Court has subject matter jurisdiction over this dispute because: (1) complete diversity exists between the parties; and (2) “the matter in controversy, upon information and belief, exceeds \$75,000, exclusive of interest and costs . . .” (Not. of Removal ¶ 2).

ANALYSIS

Under 28 U.S.C. § 1441, “any civil action brought in a State court of which the district courts of the United States have original jurisdiction, may be removed by the defendant . . .” 28 U.S.C. § 1441(a). “The [federal] district courts shall have original jurisdiction of all civil actions where the matter in controversy exceeds the sum or value of \$75,000, exclusive of interest and costs, and is between—(1) citizens of different States.” 28 U.S.C. § 1332(a). “The Supreme Court

has held that the party asserting diversity jurisdiction in federal court has the burden of establishing the existence of the jurisdictional amount in controversy.” *Villafana v. So*, No. 13-CV-00180, 2013 WL 2367792, at *1 (S.D.N.Y. May 29, 2013) (quoting *Lupo v. Human Affairs Int’l, Inc.*, 28 F.3d 269, 273 (2d Cir. 1994)). While defendants need not “prove the amount in controversy to an absolute certainty,” they have “the burden of proving that it appears to a reasonable probability that the claim is in excess of the statutory jurisdictional amount.” *Id.* (quoting *Mehlenbacher v. Akzo Nobel Salt, Inc.*, 216 F.3d 291, 296 (2d Cir. 2000)). “[I]f the jurisdictional amount is not clearly alleged in the plaintiff’s complaint, and the defendants’ notice of removal fails to allege facts adequate to establish that the amount in controversy exceeds the jurisdictional amount, federal courts lack diversity jurisdiction as a basis for removing the plaintiff’s action from state court.” *Id.* (quoting *Lupo*, 28 F.3d at 273-74).¹

Plaintiff’s Complaint alleges that she was injured when she fell in Defendants’ store. (Compl. ¶ 16). A plaintiff’s complaint, in an action to recover damages for personal injuries in New York, “shall contain a prayer for general relief but shall not state the amount of damages to which the pleader deems himself entitled.” C.P.L.R. § 3017(c). Accordingly, the Complaint does not state a specific sum of money sought from Defendants and asserts only that her damages “exceed[] the jurisdictional limit of all lower Courts which would otherwise have jurisdiction.” (Compl. ¶¶ 26, 53). If removal of a civil suit from state court to federal court is premised on 28 U.S.C. § 1332(a) and “[s]tate practice . . . does not permit demand for a specific sum,” removal is proper only “if the district court finds, by the preponderance of the evidence, that the amount in controversy exceeds [\$75,000].” 28 U.S.C. § 1446(c)(2).

¹ Federal courts “have an independent obligation to determine whether subject-matter jurisdiction exists, even in the absence of a challenge from any party.” *Nguyen v. FXCM Inc.*, 364 F. Supp. 3d 227, 237 (S.D.N.Y. 2019) (quoting *Arbaugh v. Y & H Corp.*, 546 U.S. 500, 514 (2006)).

Defendants, with respect to the amount in controversy, allege only that “the matter in controversy, upon information and belief, exceeds \$75,000, exclusive of interest and costs . . .” (Not. of Removal ¶ 2). Defendants fail to meet their burden to show that the \$75,000 jurisdictional amount required for diversity jurisdiction has been satisfied. “Indeed, neither the Complaint nor the Notice of Removal ‘contains sufficient information specifying the nature and extent of [Plaintiff’s] injuries that would permit this Court to draw a reasonable inference that the amount-in-controversy requirement has been satisfied.’” *Muniz v. CVS Albany, L.L.C.*, No. 21-CV-08179, 2021 WL 4596539, at *2 (S.D.N.Y. Oct. 6, 2021) (quoting *Brown v. NutriBullet, LLC*, No. 19-CV-05421, 2019 WL 5287960, at *2 (E.D.N.Y. Oct. 18, 2019)).

Defendants have not furnished any written indication of the amount in controversy. (*See generally*, Not. of Removal). This Court, although not required to do so, has also undertaken to review the electronic docket in the state court proceeding. That docket is similarly devoid of any written indication of the amount in controversy. (See Index No. 64571/2022, NYSCEF Doc. Nos. 1-5).

As federal courts are instructed to “construe the removal statute narrowly, resolving any doubts against removability,” *Lupo*, 28 F.3d at 274 (quoting *Somlyo v. J. Lu-Rob Enters., Inc.*, 932 F.2d 1043, 1046 (2d Cir. 1991)), Defendants’ allegation in the absence of any supporting information that the amount in controversy “upon information and belief” exceeds \$75,000 is insufficient for the Court to determine by a preponderance of the evidence that the jurisdictional threshold of 28 U.S.C. § 1332(a) has been met. *See Torres v. Merriman*, No. 20-CV-03034, 2020 WL 1910494, at *2 (S.D.N.Y. Apr. 17, 2020) (“[A] mere conclusory statement that the amount in controversy exceeds \$75,000 is insufficient for the Court to determine by a preponderance of the evidence that the jurisdiction threshold of 28 U.S.C. § 1332(a) has been met.”); *Crane Equip. &*

Servs., Inc. v. B.E.T. Const., Inc., No. 14-CV-01755, 2015 WL 471323, at *2 (W.D.N.Y. Feb. 4, 2015) (granting motion for remand where “Defendant’s Notice of Removal conclusively states that the amount in controversy is ‘[m]ore than \$75,000’ without any further clarification”); *Villafana v. So*, No. 13-CV-00180, 2013 WL 2367792, at *2 (S.D.N.Y. May 29, 2013) (“[A] ‘mere averment’ is insufficient to satisfy defendants’ burden to establish amount in controversy (quoting *McNutt v. General Motors Acceptance Corp. of Ind.*, 298 U.S. 178, 189 (1936))).

CONCLUSION

Based upon the foregoing, the Court concludes that Defendants failed to satisfy their burden of establishing that the amount in controversy exceeds \$75,000. Removal is therefore improper. Accordingly, this action is REMANDED to the Supreme Court of the State of New York, County of Westchester.

The Clerk of the Court is respectfully directed to send a copy of this Order to the Supreme Court of the State of New York, County of Westchester, and to close this action. All pending matters are hereby terminated.

SO ORDERED:

Dated: White Plains, New York
February 21, 2023


Philip M. Halpern
United States District Judge